

County Council Operating Budget Testimony

Richard Montgomery Cluster

Beall ES, College Gardens ES, Ritchie Park ES, Bayard Rustin ES, Twinbrook ES,
Julius West MS, and Richard Montgomery HS

April 25, 2023

Dear President Glass, Vice-President Friedson, and the Montgomery County Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony on the FY24 operating budget. My name is Amy Ackerberg-Hastings. I serve MCCPTA as one of this year's Richard Montgomery cluster coordinators; I am the parent of a RM freshman; and my family has enjoyed living in Montgomery County since 1997, chiefly in the Twinbrook neighborhood of Rockville.

Thank you also for your historical support of the county's children through the provision of public education and for your willingness to consider the County Executive's recommendation to fully fund the FY24 operating budget request from MCPS. We appreciate the size of this portion of the county's overall operating budget and the scope of the staffing, services, equipment, and other resources that will be made possible by this appropriation.

Some of the priorities outlined in MCPS's operating budget that we believe will be especially beneficial for our cluster include:

- An increase in **security assistants**. Before an additional position was provided in the wake of the incidents that occurred at Richard Montgomery HS in January, RM and Julius West MS had ratios (1:400) that are very high compared to other secondary schools with ratios in the 1:200s or 1:300s.
- Increased **mathematics and literacy support** is always essential in our cluster, perhaps particularly at Bayard Rustin ES and Twinbrook ES, which have substantial numbers of ESOL students as well as Twinbrook's high proportion of economic need. Additionally, enrollment of **Emergent Multilingual Learners** has increased 75% since Fall 2021 (from 120 students to 211 students) at Richard Montgomery HS. At all seven of our schools, teachers and administrators are working tirelessly to make sure no child slips through the cracks.
- Given our cluster's success with the program, we are pleased to see plans to expand access to the **Middle Years Programme** to two additional high schools and two additional middle schools.
- Attention to **professional development and teacher training** is vital for improving staff retention and maintaining the energy and creativity needed to support every one of our students.

As the ground continues to shift beneath us and our assumptions are challenged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we also continue to monitor **class sizes** that are creeping up at Beall ES and elsewhere. Additionally, we are encouraging MCPS to roll out the **Enriched Literacy Curriculum** (ELC) well. As with Compacted Math, ELC has the potential to engage upper-elementary students who are ready for advanced, rigorous instruction. However, it needs to be implemented as intended, as one tool for providing differentiated instruction, and the teacher charged with the curriculum at each school needs sound, practical training. And, we are still

pressing MCPS for flexibility in adapting to changing enrollment patterns and meeting special education and other staffing needs. Staffing allocations are set so far in advance that Bayard Rustin ES and Twinbrook ES, for example, end up shorthanded thanks to perennial swells of late enrollment. Our Director for School Support and Well-Being has been pushing for “front-loading” enrollment numbers (projecting enrollment based on previous patterns and providing space for the expected students) in order to break this Catch-22, and we support this approach.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony and for considering fully funding MCPS’s FY24 operating budget request. As I wrote last year, my dream for Montgomery County is that every student from preK to grade 12 would be genuinely known by at least one adult. Montgomery County boasts a talented, dedicated, caring group of teachers, specialists, support staff, principals, and administrators; with adequate staffing, they can ensure that every single student is mentored by at least one trustworthy adult during the school years that have formed all of us.

Sincerely,
Amy Ackerberg-Hastings, PhD
MCCPTA Cluster Co-Coordinator, Richard Montgomery Cluster